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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate students' expected use of various help sources for educational/vocational and emotional problems. Two hundred fifty undergraduate students representing three ethnic groups were asked to answer a questionnaire used to assess their preferences for help sources. Students were asked to rank the twelve help sources from the source they would go to first to the help source they would go to last indicating the order in which they perceived themselves seeking help from each source for either an educational/vocational or emotional problem. Ranking of help sources under the two problem types did not differ significantly for the group as a whole or for any subgroupings by sex or ethnic group. The total groups' rankings had implications for formal campus help giving agencies in that students identified parents, non-student friends, relatives and counseling centers as among the most preferred help sources. (Author/AM)

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Summary

Two-hundred-fifty undergraduate students representing three ethnic groups were asked to rank-order 12 help givers for educational/vocational and emotional problems. Rankings of help sources under the two problem types did not differ significantly for the group as a whole or for any subgroupings by sex or ethnic group. Although none of the obtained differences between groups or problem type were significant, the directions of the small intergroup variations in help sources rankings did support other studies' findings regarding blacks and Asian-Americans. Additionally, the total groups' rankings had implications for formal campus help-giving agencies in that students identified parents, non-student friends, relatives and counseling centers as among the five most preferred help sources. Implications for refinements in such research are discussed.

Setting priorities for human service has become increasingly complex and difficult as agencies experience rapid change in the demography of the populations they serve. Constituents' preferences for different types of help sources provide a type of data which is readily accessible, yet not frequently used. Such data can be easily obtained and be of considerable value in agencies' plans for staffing and outreach. For example, data obtained from assessment of expectations of the communities' members concerning their expected utilization of help sources can have an important role in improving communication and contact between groups of service providers and consumers (Christensen and Magoon, 1974; Penny and Buckles 1966; and Stranges and Riccio 1970). Both Penny and Buckles (1966) and Weiss (1974) used preference data as part of a needs assessment program. Weiss discusses a consumer model for assessing Community Mental Health Needs based on survey data. She identified physicians, clergy, and bartenders as help givers who are often sought out in communities as initial health service providers.

The necessity for an actual assessment of where an individual expects to go for help recently has become even more critical; the trends of the 1970's in financial support of human services programs indicating increasing federal impoundment of resources devoted to programs. Because such an entrenchment results in many programmatic restrictions and increased requests for accountability, it is of utmost importance to explore areas that will provide fuller understanding of help seeking behaviors of constituents.

Research with college students contributing to such an understanding is plentiful but difficult to summarize due to variations in sampling,

measurement techniques, objectives and results obtained. Recent data adds little to Form's (1953) suggestion that "all college students do not seek organized counseling when they are confronted with problems. Many prefer to solve their difficulties in their own way or seek advice from other sources." (p. 209.)

The present body of relevant research indicates that choice of a helper is often related to the type of problem experienced, students' opinions concerning the role of the help source and beliefs concerning the usefulness of the help source e.g., Gelso and Karl, 1974; Gonyea and Warman, 1962 , i.e. students seeking insight look for counseling psychologists rather than counselors (Getsinger and Garfield, 1976), those with educational/vocational concerns go to counselors, and psychiatrists are viewed as most appropriate for personal problems (Strong, Hendel and Bratton, 1971).

Other factors that have been shown to influence these preferences for help sources include sex of respondent, e.g. both males and females preferred to seek help from same sex counselors (Fuller, 1964) and males preferred "no one" more often than females (Penney and Buckles, 1966).

Students' preferences toward help sources are influenced also by a number of social and cultural factors. Smith (1974) points out that students in general prefer a counselor's age, socioeconomic background, religious belief and sex to be similar to their own and minorities prefer counselors of the same race. Differences in the selection of help sources due to socioeconomic status have been suggested by the research of Leavitt, Cary and Swartz (1972) who found low income families and foreign families view psychological services as shameful and threatening, further supported by Sue and Sue (1974), whose

findings indicated most self-referral among the Asian students is inhibited by cultural influences. Interestingly, Wolkin, Woriwaki and Williams (1973), in a study combining both racial and socioeconomic status found that only socioeconomic status was a major variable affecting students' attitudes toward seeking help. When examining students' preferences for counselors, students' ethnic identification has been a significant variable. Sue and Kirk (1975) studying Asian American utilization of counseling services found variations between groups according to sex and culture, i.e. Chinese American females utilized mental health facilities significantly more frequently than Japanese American students.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate students' expected use of various help sources for educational/vocational and emotional problems. Additionally, the present data will permit an examination of sex differences in preference rankings, the results of which can be compared with previous studies of sex differences of help source ratings (e.g. Christensen and Magoon, 1974). Finally, interactions of specific race and sex combinations can be examined.

Method

Subject

A total of 1,090 students from five undergraduate courses, Psychology, Mathematics, History, English and Criminology, were administered the questionnaire described below. Fifty-five (55) questionnaires were incomplete and, therefore, not used. The remaining 1, 035 completed questionnaires making up the total sample consisted of 116 black students (11% of the total sample), 18 Asian Americans, 11 Spanish American surnamed and 9 foreign students The latter groups each comprised less than 2% of the total sample.

Analyses were completed on 250 students involving the responses of the Asian American students (8 males and 10 females), 116 black students (39 males and 77 females) and a similar group of 116 white students obtained through stratified (by sex) random sampling from the total pool of white respondents. The sample used for analyses then was composed of 66% females and 34% males. Other demographic data collected on the sample indicated that 66% were freshman, 25% sophomore, 6% junior, 2% senior and 1% special students.

Measure and Procedures

A self-report questionnaire similar to that used by Christensen and Magoon (1974) was used to assess students' preferences for help sources. The questionnaire was based on two categories of problems most often identified by counseling services as the major categories of student problems: (1) educational/vocational and (2) emotional concerns.

The list of help sources to be rated included the twelve sources listed in Table 1. This list was modified from that used by Christensen and Magoon (1974) in order to provide a broader representation of the help sources which might be available to the students,especially minority students.

Students were first asked to assume they are faced with a problem concerning future job and/or major and have tried unsuccessfully to reach a solution themselves. They were then asked to rank the twelve help sources from the source they would go to first (rank #1) to the help source they would go to last (rank #12) indicating the order in which they perceived themselves seeking help from each source for such a problem. Students were then asked to provide a second set of rankings following the same procedure while assuming they have emotional problems characterized by nervousness. Two forms of

the questionnaire, varying the order of presentation of problem type, were presented in counterbalanced fashion to control for order effect.

Results

For purposes of analysis, the rank each student attributed to a particular help source was ordered such that a range of scores fell into a interval designated by the lowest to highest scores attributed to the help source. The numerical value of the case found on the fiftieth percentile of this interval was designed as the median rank for the help source. These medians were then ordered such that the help source with the lowest group median was ranked #1 and that with the highest ranked #12.

The primary concern of this study was to explore how demographically identifiable groups of students rank preferences for help sources when faced with each of two types of problems: emotional and educational/vocational. The Kruskal -Wallis one way analysis of variance for independent samples (Siegel, 1956) was utilized to compare students' rankings of help sources for each problem type, with subjects divided into groups on the basis of demographic information, i.e. sex, race.

The primary analyses of these data then involved two sets of comparisons of rankings by student subgroups (Asian, black and white students and male and female students) under each of the problem categories. Additional Kruskal-Wallis analyses involved the comparison of rankings by each sex of each race classification, i.e. comparisons of rankings by black males, white males, Asian males, rankings by Asian females, black females and white females and rankings by males and females <u>within</u> each racial group. The obtained Kruskal-Wallis values for each of the comparisons were as follows: for educational/vocational problems comparing black, white and Asian Americans (H=.006); males

and females (H=.05); black males, white males and Asian males (H=.28); black females, white females and Asian females (H=.004); Asian males and females (H=.12); black males and black females (H=.05); white males and white females (H=.01); for emotional problems, Asian American, black and white (H=.08); males and females (H=.09);Asian American, black and white males (H=.007); Asian American, black and white females (H=.27); Asian American males and Asian American females (H=.05); black males and black females (H=.08); white males and white females (H=.04). The rank orders and median values of preferences of each of these groups appear in Table 1. Table 2 provides combined group rank orders for each problem type.

The rankings of the total student sample were not significantly different for the two problem types using the Friedman Two Way Analysis of Variance ($p < .10$, $x^r = 3.0$, df=1). The rank ordering shown in Table 2 indicates that students identified parent, non-student friends, relatives and counseling centers as among the five preferred help sources from which they would seek assistance for either emotional or educational/vocational problems.

Discussion

Differences in rankings did not vary greatly across race or sex or problem type. All groups of students tended to rank the same help sources highly, e.g. parents and relatives, and just as consistently rank certain others quite low, e.g. private practice psychotherapist, health center mental health service and community mental health service. With these highest and lowest choice similarities across situations and groups, there was little possibility for the other choices to vary greatly in their ranks.

The first part of the discussion addresses the implications of the results interpreted as a general homogeneous set of rankings. The next part of the

discussion focuses on the possibilities for assuming that the students' preferences are not as homogeneous as the present data suggest and the implications thereof. Finally, several limitations to generalization of the results are noted.

The rankings of the total sample of students showed parents as a primary resource for assistance with educational/vocational problems. This implies, perhaps incorrectly, that parents are really prepared to handle matters of vocational choice. Similarly, the high ranking of faculty members implies that students often view faculty members as prepared to assist them with vocational problems; students may need to be informed that the only faculty usually prepared for such roles are those functioning as career advisors in various administrative offices.

The distinctly low preferences to utilize residence hall counselors, community mental health services, the health center mental health services and private practice psychotherapists as help givers, even for emotional problems, are congruent with data from previous studies, i.e. Armstrong 1969; Snyder, Hill and Derksen, 1972. In view of these consistent findings, these resources need to explore students' perceptions of their functions in order to assess whether these low rankings are an indication of negative attitudes toward these services or an inappropriate understanding of availability and suitability of these services.

Rankings indicate that students would more readily seek assistance from counseling centers when experiencing educational/vocational problems than when experiencing emotional problems are also consistent with the results of previous studied (i.e. Warman, 1960; Wilcove and Sharp, 1971). A comparison of the present data with Christensen and Magoon's (1974) findings show that parents are ranked higher as help sources in the present study for both types of problems. This result may be due to differences in the samples used for each study.

Christensen and Magoon used a large number of upper classmen; this study surveyed primarily freshman. Consistent with Christensen and Magoon, this study found rankings of the help sources by males and by females did not differ significantly.

These rankings can provide an empirical basis for counseling centers' outreach services. Do parents and faculty have the necessary knowledge and resources to meet students' expectations? Counseling centers' outreach efforts can help parents and faculty clarify students' expectations of them and better understand what they can do most usefully as primary help givers. For example, parents' orientation sessions can be used to provide parents with information concerning students' problems in adjusting to college life, how they can be helpful and how to refer students to counseling services which are available to them. In addition, mental health workers could provide ongoing consultative services to parents and faculty.

As noted above, the extreme similarity of most and least preferred help sources from the 12 sources may have obscured, in terms of statistical significance, meaningful, thought slight, variations between groups rankings. For the purposes of raising questions for further, more focused research, several observed variations that are congruent with previous literature and/or counselor lore are noted here.

In contrast to both black and white students who ranked parents as their most preferred sources for emotional problems, both Asian males and females ranked relatives as their first preference to contact for this type of problem. These findings possibly support the conclusions of Sue and Sue (1974) that it is shameful to seek assistance for personal problems in the Asian cultural context. However, this finding also permits the conclusion that the Asian culture fosters a rather closed community and extended family members might be viewed as a highly acceptable resource for help and therefore given a rank higher

than that of parent. Further research with this group could assess the implications of this apparent uniqueness in preferences.

Examination of Table I shows that black students indicate they would use the university counseling center earliest in the help seeking process when faced with an educational/vocational problem but only as a sixth source for emotional problems. In part, these findings are not expected based on literature discussing blacks' usage of counseling centers and mental health services, i.e. Thomas (1970), Burrell & Rayder, (1971). Winer, Pasca, Dinello and Weingarten (1974) found in a survey of counseling center directors that these directors believe minority students prefer services with black staff or which relate specifically to their concerns, hence these preferences result in a low utilization of counseling services. If the present results are generalizable, further focused research is needed to clarify potential misconceptions of help service providers concerning where minority students now go for assistance.

The list of help sources used in any study places some limitations on the study in that both the quantity and quality of students' responses are affected. Longer more exhaustive lists versus shorter lists, rank orders versus free response could all elicit data which may or may not be congruent with present results. Further studies should include the category of student friend and "no one", both of which have been identified as desired options in previous studies.

Survey data have the inherent limitation of being based on what the students say they would do. One must note the possible effect of unreliability and social desirability response sets in the questionnaire and that

self predictions of behavior may differ from past behavior or probable future behavior. Although it is reasonable to assume that the individual is often in a better position to observe and report his/her beliefs and feelings than anyone else; this assumption is valid only if the individual is aware of his/her beliefs and feelings and is willing to reveal them to others. This assumption may be checked by the use of attitude measures that focus on the respondents' beliefs and feelings about engaging in particular behaviors. Azen and Fishbein (1973) have distingushed the assessment of attitudes toward objects from the assessment of attitudes toward an act. Applying this distinction to the present study, the former would focus on individuals' attitudes toward the help sources while the latter is concerned with the attitude toward seeking assistance from the help source. Further research in this area could benefit from attention to this distinction.

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Table 1

The Rankings of Help Sources for Student Subgroups Under Educational/Vocational Emotional Problem Types

	Educational/Vocational Problem						Emotional Problems					
	Male			Female			Male			Female		
Source	White	Black	Asian	White	Black	Asian	White	Black	Asian	White	Black	Asian
Faculty	2 (2.50)*	3 (3.11)	3 (2.83)	2 (2.25)	3 (2.69)	2 (2.50)	7 (6.67)	5 (6.13)	4.5 (5.50)	7 (7.80)	12 (8.89)	6 (6.50)
Physician	9 (8.50)	9 (8.75)	6.5 (6.50)	9 (8.85)	9 (8.41)	9.5 (9.00)	5 (6.00)	4 (5.15)	4.5 (5.50)	4 (5/60)	4 (5.31)	9.5 (8.00)
University Counseling Center	3 (3.19)	2 (2.88)	5 (5.00)	5 (5.19)	1 (2.18)	3 (3.00)	4 (5.75)	6.5 (6.40)	6 (6.00)	6 (6.54)	6 (6.34)	4 (5.00)
Parent	1 (2.00)	1 (2.15)	1 (1.30)	1 (2.00)	2 (2.65)	1 (2.00)	1 (1.92)	1 (1.69)	2 (2.40)	1 (1.66)	1 (1.53)	2.5 (2.50)
Relative	4 (4.40)	5 (4.65)	2 (2.50)	4 (4.40)	4 (3.97)	5 (4.00)	2 (2.92)	2 (2.85)	1 (1.21)	2 (2.07)	2 (2.45)	1 (1.50)
Non-Student Friend	5 (4.44)	4 (4.14)	4 (4.00)	3 (4.44)	5 (4.70)	4 (3.75)	3 (3.80)	3 (3.35)	3 (3.16)	3 (2.93)	3 (2.90)	2.5 (2.50)
Clergyman/Minister	7 (7.43)	7.5 (7.29)	8 (7.50)	8 (7.43)	8 (8.28)	8 (8.83)	8 (7.00)	6.5 (6.40)	8 (7.50)	9 (8.35)	7 (7.50)	8 (7.50)
Community Mental Health Service	11 (10.00)	10 (10.11)	10.5 (9.83)	11 (10.00)	11 (10.02)	9.5 (9.00)	10 (8.64)	10.5 (8.67)	11 (10.17)	11 (8.81)	10 (8.45)	11 (9.00)
Residence Hall Counselor	8 (7.57)	6 (6.40)	9 (8.53)	6 (7.57)	6 (5.92)	7 (7.00)	11 (9.08)	9 (8.44)	10 (9.17)	10 (8.57)	8 (8.18)	7 (7.17)

*Median values for each group shown in parentheses

Table 1 (continued)

The Rankings of Help Sources for Student Subgroups Under Educational/Vocational, Emotional Problem Types

	Educational/Vocational Problems						Emotional Problems					
	Male			Female			Male			Female		
Source	White	Black	Asian	White	Black	Asian	White	Black	Asian	White	Black	Asian
Health Center Mental	10 (9.75)*	11 (10.14)	10.5 (9.83)	10 (9.75)	10 (9.95)	11 (9.75)	9 (7.40)	10.5 (8.67)	9 (8.50)	8 (8.19)	9 (8.32)	9.5 (8.00)
Private Practice Therapist	12 (10.29)	12 (10.58)	12 (11.00)	12 (10.29)	12 (10.59)	12 (11.00)	12 (9.60)	12 (9.00)	12 (10.80)	12 (9.60)	11 (8.73)	12 (10.00)
Help Crisis Center	6 (7.25)	7.5 (7.29)	6.5 (6.50)	7 (7.25)	7 (7.22)	6 (6.50)	6 (6.06)	8 (8.20)	7 (6.50)	5 (6.47)	5 (5.97)	5 (5.50)

*Median values for each group shown in parentheses

Comparison of Rankings of Help Sources for Educational/Vocational Problems versus Emotional Problems

Ranking	Educational/Vocational	Emotional
1	Parent	Parent
2	Faculty Member	Non-Student Friend
3	University Counseling Center	Relative
4	Non-Student Friend	Physician
5	Relative	University Counseling Center
6	Residence Hall Counselor	Help Crisis Center
7	Help Crisis Center	Clergyman/Minister
8	Clergyman/Minister	Faculty Member
9	Physician	Health Center Mental Health Service
10	Community Mental Health Service	Residence Hall Counselor
11	Health Center Mental Health Service	Community Mental Health Service
12	Private Practice Psychotherapist	Private Practice Psychotherapist